

NO MORE CHANCES

A young mother said to me:

"I get so angry sometimes; I treat the children so badly. They just upset me. Johnny is always picking on Mary and making her whine. I have to just stay on top of them all the time to prevent them from doing something they shouldn't. What can I do to overcome my anger?"

Previously, the parents rewarded disobedience by saying, "Now Johnny, I have told you not to do that. I am going to give you one more chance, and then I will have to spank you." As he continued to disobey, her frustration mounted.

The parents had effectively taught their child that he could disobey until the parent's frustration reached a certain level. When he perceived that they had had all they were going to take, he knew it was time to back off for a while. He could return to his disobedience as soon as they cooled off. Sometimes, miscalculating, he pushed her too far, and she would "go off" before he could comply.

The mother's anger could be overcome if she would remove the cause of her anger. No, not the children, but their disobedience. Eventually, she always got them to obey. It was the long dragged-out, tense and competitive prelude to their eventual obedience that was stirring her ire. The children were actually responding quite predictably. She had trained them not to obey until she got angry.

I gave her a copy of some child training material that I had written. Reading it, she decided to make some changes. She made it plain to her son that he was not to tease his smaller sister. She told Johnny that if he disobeyed he would be spanked for the first offense. The first spanking was a shock to Johnny. Mother was not waiting until she got mad. No warnings, no threats—she seemed to expect him to obey the very first time!

After two days of consistently rewarding every transgression with a spanking, Johnny turned to his mother and said, "But Mother, you are not giving me any more chances!" The mother said, "That's right, you don't get any more chances. From now on you are to always obey the first time." He had been using his "chances" to purchase disobedience. After two years he now obeys the first time, and Mother no longer gets angry.

LICENSE TO DISOBEY

When the State Fish and Game Commission issues permits allowing you to catch five trout, but no more, they are not preventing trout fishing, they are advocating it. These parents had issued their children a license to be disobedient five times, but punished them for the sixth offense. So every day the children went fishing for trouble, but always with an eye on the "warden." They would try to anticipate when to stop short of the real "last chance."

When Mom reduced the disobedience limit to zero and outlawed disobedience, little Johnny had to test the lawgiver to see if it was just another permit. When the "Warden" (Mama) proved to be serious, he decided that he didn't love "fishing for trouble" enough to pay the fine for what he caught. Little Johnny started obeying all laws the first time.

If State Troopers ceased writing tickets and instead started nagging and threatening, it would be tantamount to abolishing the speed limit. Picture a trooper pulling a speeder over and then explaining how sad it makes him feel for them to be going so fast. Can you see a trooper sitting on the side of the road shaking his fist and turning red in the face as cars speed by? After the sixth time of motorists being told, "Now I am not going to tell you again," all law would break down into *"and every man did that which was right in his own eyes."*

Parent, you cannot blame your children if you have caused them to understand that disobedience is only unacceptable after several warnings and then a threat topped off by an ultimatum, and finally a gesture of force.

ANGER

Parent, you have trained yourself not to discipline immediately, but to wait until your irritation builds into anger. You have allowed your motivation to be anger. "But how can I stop being so angry?" Simple. Discipline them immediately upon the slightest disobedience. Don't wait until it becomes a personal affront to you.

The children perceive in your anger and frustration that the discipline is a personal matter, a competition of interest. You are viewed by the child much as they view a bigger child who is bullying them in order to get his own way. They are not being made to respect the law and lawgiver; they are simply being made to give-in to a superior force. They feel as if you are committing a personal transgression against them—violating their rights. They see you as just protecting your own rights and trampling on theirs. You have lost the dignity of your office. As they say, "You are not Presidential enough." Where there is no unwavering rule of law with consistent enforcement, in the child's mind there is no law at all, just competition for supremacy.

You have taught yourself to be motivated only by anger. And you have taught your child to respond only to anger. Having failed to properly train your child, you have allowed the seeds of self-indulgence to grow to ugly proportions.

I MADE A CHILD THAT I DON'T LIKE

The reason you are angry toward your children is that you don't like them. "Oh! I love my children very much." I didn't say you didn't love them. I say there are occasions when you just don't like them, for the simple reason that at such times they are very unlikable. It is impossible to like a whining, selfish, self-centered, spoiled brat.

We cannot help approving of that which is good and lovely, and despising that which is ugly and unwholesome. God himself has such feelings (Ps. 11:5). We are involuntarily very fair about it. When we think we are ugly in spirit we equally dislike ourselves.

You must face the fact that there are times when you just do not like your own child. I have observed the sometimes intense dislike of a mother for her teenage daughter or son. You may say, "But no one else dislikes the youth." If they had to live with him on the same terms as the parent, they would.

Now, why is your child unlikable? You will not like the answer: You made him that way through your training techniques. You may say, "But, I have not instituted any training techniques. I just scold them when it gets to be too much to bear." Precisely.

All children are trained. Their responses and actions are a reflection of their association to their principal caretakers. To neglect careful nurturing and training while trying to keep them in line through threat, intimidation, nagging, anger, and an occasional outburst of spanking is the most negative of training exercises.

Most automobile drivers are aware that the radar patrolman will usually allow motorists to go four-miles-per-hour over the speed limit without issuing a ticket. Consequently, most motorists will drive four or five miles-per-hour over the speed limit. When you allow your children to be disobedient four or five times before applying discipline, you are training them to disobey.

There is nothing cute or lovable about a whining "brat." To allow a child to whine and disobey is to mold a personality and character that you will eventually find hard to like. By taking control and teaching them to control their emotions and to instantly obey, the child will be cheerful and pleasant. Then the mother will like her daughter as well as love her. The child reciprocates the mother's delight by loving and honoring her even more. They can both enjoy each other's company. The mother is rested and refreshed by spending time with her children.

THE FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD

Talking with a mother concerned about the attitude of her fourteen-year-old, it became apparent she just did not like her own child. The mother's disapproval and frequent criticism had caused the daughter to become morose.

Actually, she was a very good and obedient daughter. She was cheerful with others, but sullen with her mother. The mother was wondering if she should use the rod to correct bad attitudes. She was afraid she had lost all control and influence. The mother had a very stormy youth and was anxious to prevent her daughter from the same fate. The more irritated the mother became and the harder she pushed, the more ground she lost.

I knew this family when the daughter was a child. I recall that even then the mother didn't like her daughter. Taking her own ugly attitude to Christ, the mother found cleansing and healing. The teenage daughter quickly showed tremendous improvement.

Sometimes in the areas of talent and personality, parents have narrow expectations for their children and are critical when they fall short. But, more prominently, where the parents are poor trainers, they come to dislike the child they have produced. If you have painted a picture that you don't like, don't blame the canvas. Get out the brushes and paint over the mess.